



SAFE PASSAGE



A Newsletter for the Humanitarian Mine Action and Small Arms/Light Weapons Communities

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“We Love Life”

by Anne Stewart, Lennis Echterling, Hasan Hamdan, Dennis Barlow and Suzanne Fiederlein, JMU/MAIC

*Hands in hands!
Regardless of color,
Regardless of age,
Whether injured or not,
Regardless of beliefs,
To protect people—all people
Because a human is a human.*

James Madison University's Mine Action Information Center (MAIC) has collaborated with Jordan's Life Line for Consultancy and Rehabilitation (LLCR) and the National Committee for Demining and Rehabilitation (NCDR) to produce a play and creative arts program called “We Love Life.” The play, written by well-known Jordanian playwright Ghannam Ghannam, offers a comprehensive mine-risk education (MRE) experience that meets international and Jordanian standards. The play was performed in February and March for large, appreciative audiences in north-western Jordan. A special performance in Amman was held on April 4, International Mine Awareness Day.

“We Love Life” is aimed at adolescents aged 11 to 15. The Jordanian cast and crew includes individuals who are survivors of landmine and unexploded ordnance (UXO) accidents. The actors participate with the audience in songs and dances, answer questions, and share their own stories at the conclusion of the performance. The script emphasizes the resilience of survivors who have gone on to thrive. At the conclusion of each performance, audience members receive materials from NCDR with important MRE messages.

Another component of the project includes art activities in a number of communities in the high-risk, northern area of Jordan. For example, in the community of Sima Al Sarhan, Jordanian artist Abdel Aziz Abu Ghazaleh is working with local schoolchildren to create a sculpture in a well-traveled public site. The theme of the sculpture is “Be Safe,” and it will include mural artwork by the schoolchildren. Documentarians will record performances of the play and the creation of the community art projects to broadcast later in other venues, including Jordanian television stations.

The project includes several innovations. First, instead of focusing on only information regarding the risks of landmines and UXO, it promotes positive attitudes and appreciation for the resilience of survivors. Second, it emphasizes the message that children can



Photos courtesy of LLCR

Local boys paint murals in Al Baej, Al-Mafraq governorate, Jordan.



Performance of “We Love Life” in Al Baej.

be important resources for promoting the safety and well-being of the entire community. The third innovation is a multifaceted assessment procedure that evaluates knowledge, attitude and behavior changes in the student participants.

“Jordan MRE Project,” continued on page 4

QRF Deploys to Bulgaria

by Stacy Bernard Davis, PM/WRA

In November 2008, shortly after the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs' Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement (PM/WRA) in the U.S. Department of State awarded a contract to DynCorp International for the formation of a humanitarian Quick Reaction Force (QRF), the first QRF Assessment Team deployed to Bulgaria. The QRF was assembled to respond globally to urgent and emergent humanitarian operations that require the removal or mitigation of explosive hazards to protect civilian populations.

A July 3 accident at the Chelopechene ammunition storage facility on the outskirts of Sofia, Bulgaria, caused extensive damage when several large detonations occurred in the munitions storage area. The first QRF Assessment Team deployed on November 22 in response to the Bulgarian government's request for technical assistance with the clearance and disposal of unexploded ordnance (UXO) from the Chelopechene blast site.

Following the assessment, the QRF Operational Element mobilized and deployed with 12 Senior Technical Advisors to conduct a UXO surface clearance of the storage area. Between December 10, 2008, and February 2, 2009, under adverse weather conditions, the QRF team cleared 38,539 square meters and recovered 110,416 pieces of UXO without accident or injury. UXO disposal operations were completed on March 27, 2009.

This new QRF reflects the continued U.S. commitment to post-conflict or post-catastrophe explosive munitions clearance and destruction programs. As population pressures in the developing world encroach on previously isolated ammunition storage facilities, and as munitions age and experience adverse environmental conditions, the U.S. government is prepared to help governments react quickly if devastating explosions occur. The QRF will work in concert with foreign governments and U.S. embassies around the world.



Photos by Mark Tobias, DynCorp International

Members of the QRF clear a crater.



QRF team members identify ordnance found in Bulgaria.

CALM Helps Child Landmine Survivors in Ethiopia

by Desu Damtew, Executive Director, CALM

The Coalition Against Landmines (CALM) held its second fundraising event to support child landmine survivors in Ethiopia on February 6 in Washington, D.C. Colonel Yori Escalante, Deputy Director of PM/WRA, and Lora Lumpe of the United States Campaign to Ban Landmines and Cluster Bombs, made presentations.

CALM is a U.S.-based nonprofit founded in December 2006, providing the necessary funding for survivor children's rehabilitation, education and transport. The organization launched its first project (Project TG) in Ethiopia in June 2008. Project TG is a collaboration between CALM and Mekelle Ortho-Physiotherapy Center (MOPC), located in the city of Mekelle, capital city of the Tigray region in northern Ethiopia. MOPC produces affordable orthopedic appliances

and provides physical therapy and psychosocial support for mine victims in the region. In addition to providing rehabilitation services to the children, MOPC tracks their education, health and other concerns, and then reports the findings to CALM.

Funds raised at the event will allow CALM to add two more child landmine accident survivors to its Project TG program, bringing the total to four children within the Tigray region of Ethiopia under its care. However, due to a shortage of funding, there are more than 20 other landmine survivors under the age of 12 on the waiting list in the small region of Mekelle alone. For more information about CALM and Project TG, visit www.calmint.org.

Sri Lankan Schoolchildren Celebrate the Mine Clearance of School Roads

by Steen Wetlesen, Program Manager, DDG–Sri Lanka



Photos by Steen Wetlesen

Schoolchildren starting a run along one of the cleared roads to celebrate its mine clearance.



Schoolchildren running on a cleared road.

The Danish Demining Group (DDG) completed clearance of three of the four access roads across the four-kilometer long Selvanagar mine belt, situated just north of Toppur village in the eastern district of Trincomalee, Sri Lanka. The clearance was supported by the Danish International Development Agency, the government of Japan, and PM/WRA. DDG, part of the Danish Refugee Council, has been performing mine and unexploded ordnance clearance in Sri Lanka since 2003.

To celebrate the return of these roads for safe travel, area schools arranged a Saturday morning run along one of the cleared roads, with 180 children, aged 12 to 18, participating in separate events by age and sex. After the races, DDG staff presented a program on the danger of mines and the importance of respecting warning signs, since the area surrounding the roads still needs to be cleared, a task DDG expects will take at least a year.

The Selvanagar mine belt had been preventing resettlement of the long-empty villages to the north. When access roads reopened, nearly 800 families returned to their homes, with more arriving daily. With support from USAID, temporary houses are being constructed in the area for the many internally displaced persons still living in camps. Areas cleared by DDG could later become part of a permanent housing community.

The Mine Detection Dog Center for South East Europe Marks 5th Anniversary

by Nermin Hadzimujagic, Director, MDDC

In October 2008, the Mine Detection Dog Center for South East Europe (MDDC), located in Bosnia-Herzegovina, marked the 5th anniversary of its official opening on October 14, 2003. Created and funded by PM/WRA, with the support of the Bosnian government, the MDDC has become recognized as the leading mine-detecting dog center in the region and beyond.

The MDDC has trained over 150 dogs with the goal of improving the lives of the people of southeast Europe and supporting the detection and clearance of landmines and other explosive remnants of war. These working dogs are used by mine-clearance organizations and police departments. Besides training mine-detecting dogs and handlers, MDDC's teams have continuously supported demining efforts throughout the region, including in Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Serbia.

In its five accident-free years of business, MDDC has expanded its efforts to provide dogs and handlers to countries outside of the region. For instance, mine detection dogs trained at MDDC are contributing to the removal of mines in countries such as Azerbaijan, Iraq, and Lebanon.

We look forward to the MDDC's continued success. Visit its Web site at <http://www.mddc.ba/eng/home.html>.



Photo courtesy of MDDC

MDDC trainees (both human and canine). The organization celebrates its 5th anniversary.

WRA Educational Outreach Continues

by Stacy Bernard Davis, PM/WRA

PM/WRA Deputy Director, Colonel Yori Escalante, addressed close to 200 students gathered at Texas A&M University's 54th annual Student Conference on National Affairs (SCONA) on February 27. The conference, held February 26–28, focused on "U.S. Intervention in Problematic Areas Around the World." Col. Escalante's talk about the U.S. government's humanitarian mine action and conventional weapons destruction programs meshed well with SCONA's purpose of fostering awareness, discussion, and involvement among student leaders across the nation on issues of national and international significance that will affect the United States and future generations.

Col. Escalante also participated in the capstone event of the conference, reviewing policy proposals from small student groups. The policy proposals addressed the theme of the conference, and ranged from engagement with Iran to stemming the drug-cartel violence in Mexico.



Photo courtesy of Col. Yori Escalante

Col. Yori Escalante, a 1986 graduate of Texas A&M University, talks with conference participants.



Photo courtesy of LLCR

MRE-themed murals on walls of the Jaber Center for Social Development in Al Baej.

"Jordan MRE Project," continued from page 1

"We Love Life" is supported by a grant from PM/WRA. It is regarded as one component of a multifaceted and integrated mine- and ERW-risk education program coordinated by the Jordanian government's National Committee for Demining and Rehabilitation. The project also heralds the debut of Jordanian NGO LLCR, directed by landmine survivor Kamel Al-Saadi.

The JMU/MAIC's project team consists of Drs. Anne Stewart and Lennis Echterling of the JMU Department of Psychology, Dr. Hasan Hamdan of the JMU Department of Mathematics and Statistics, MAIC Director Dennis Barlow and MAIC Project Manager Dr. Suzanne Fiederlein. For more information about the MAIC, see: <http://maic.jmu.edu>.

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